



STATE OF MICHIGAN

JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING

REBECCA A. HUMPHRIES
DIRECTOR

June 13, 2006

The Honorable Patricia L. Birkholz, Chair
Senate Committee on Natural Resources
and Environmental Affairs
805 Farnum Building
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536

The Honorable David W. Palsrok, Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources,
Great Lakes, Land Use, and Environment
S1385 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7514

The Honorable Michelle McManus, Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Natural Resources
905 Farnum Building
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536

The Honorable Howard Walker, Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Natural Resources
S-1388 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7514

Dear Senators Birkholz and McManus and Representatives Palsrok and Walker:

Pursuant to Section 807, PA 154 of 2005, the Department of Natural Resources (Department) is required to submit a comprehensive plan to expand current off-road vehicle trail mileage by at least 25% over the next four years. The plan is attached. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Sharon M. Schafer, Chief
Budget and Support Services
517-335-3276

Attachment

cc: Senate Committee on Natural Resources/Environmental Affairs
House Committee on Natural Resources,
Great Lakes, Land Use, and Environment
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Members
House Appropriations Subcommittee Members
Ms. Jessica Runnels, Senate Fiscal Agency
Dr. Kirk Lindquist, House Fiscal Agency
Ms. Mary Lannoye, State Budget Director, Department of
Management and Budget (DMB)
Mr. Jacques McNeely, DMB
Ms. Jennifer Harrison, DMB
Director Rebecca Humphries, DNR
Mr. Dennis Fedewa, Chief Deputy, DNR
Ms. Arminda Koch, Resource Management Deputy, DNR
Mr. Dennis Fox, Chief of Staff, DNR
Mr. Rodney Stokes, Legislative Liaison, DNR
Ms. Lynne Boyd, DNR

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**Department of Natural Resources
Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Section 807 Report**

ORV Trail Program Status:

Currently, the ORV Trail, Route, and Area System Program (System) has 3,185 designated miles. A proposed 25% increase in trail mileage equals 796 miles. This would equate to an annual expansion rate at 199 miles per year for four years.

Public Act 451 of 1994, Part 811, Section 81119, provides for the Department distribution of grants to plan, improve, construct, sign, and maintain ORV trails, areas, routes and access to those; the leasing of land, the acquisition of easements, permits, or other agreements for the use of land for ORV trails, areas, and routes, to public agencies and nonprofit clubs and organizations. The Department works with trail advocates in designating trails and routes through a Trail Proposal Process.

System designated trails reside entirely on public lands or public road rights-of-way. In contrast, the Snowmobile Trail Program has 50% of its 6,200 designated trail miles on private lands, 25% on state forest lands and 25% on national forest lands. Expansion of the ORV trail system on private lands must be considered. Trail grant sponsors and manufacturers will be encouraged to assist in the effort to expand the designated ORV trail system by 25% in four years. Their advocacy and willingness to maintain expanded riding opportunities is crucial in meeting this ambitious plan objective.

Environmental damage from illegal ORV use is an ongoing land management challenge for both state and federal land managers. Illegal ORV users jeopardize other legal mandates or program missions. Illegal ORV use was cited as a significant finding during the December 2005 forest certification audits by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Corrective measures by the Department must occur by October 2006 to address the illegal use and resulting environmental damage to sustain forest certification.

Trail Expansion Plan

1. Upgrades: The existing designated ORV system will be upgraded to the point of all trails/routes meeting maintenance standards, thus meeting recreational needs and safeguarding riders and the environment.

Rationale is that the 1997 designated system assessment (Lynch and Nelson 1997) noted that 61% of the system was rated as *good* (meeting maintenance standards over more than 95% of the trail/route mileage). The 2004 designated system assessment reported that 67% was rated as *good* and only 2% rated as *poor*. While this demonstrates progress, a considerable portion of the designated system is not meeting maintenance standards.

Key challenges noted in the 2004 assessment concerning trails not meeting maintenance standards were poor overall maintenance, need for re-routes or boardwalks for wet areas, need for additional brushing, erosion concerns, illegal uses near trails (e.g. hill climbs, spur trails) and inadequate or improper signage, and whooped out (corrugated) trails.

2. Acquisition: The Department has identified an available abandoned rail corridor in the western Upper Peninsula that directly connects Michigan's 67-mile Iron River to Marinesco Trail to the designated Wisconsin ORV trail system. This acquisition will provide additional regional tourism opportunities for Michigan and Wisconsin trail riders by providing linking access to 360 miles of designated All Terrain Vehicle trails that are currently not accessible to Michigan residents. Negotiations for the purchase of the corridor are underway.
3. ORV Plan Implementation: A Department-initiated public planning process during 2004-2005 to update the ORV plan and assess program needs resulted in diverse opinion. The process began with a proposal by Michigan State University to update Michigan's ORV plan. Once accepted, the public process began with a presentation to the ORV Advisory Board in May 2004. Since then, there has been significant public involvement through three geographically-distributed public information meetings, workshops with ORV trail maintenance and environmental restoration grant recipients. There have also been opportunities for written comments and mail surveys of Michigan county sheriffs, northern Michigan road commission managers, and ORV coordinators from the other 49 states. Also, two meetings were held with Department field personnel and one with the management team of the Forest, Mineral and Fire Management Division, the lead Department division in ORV planning and administration. Finally, the author reviewed legislative history and research concerning ORV use and users in Michigan and elsewhere. The Department will complete its review of the Plan submitted by MSU and make final recommendations to the Director and the Natural Resources Commission in September 2006.
4. Designated Scramble Areas: The Department will better publicize existing ORV scramble areas and provide at least one new area. At the public information meetings, some ORV licensees, especially those with large four-wheel drive vehicles, expressed a lack of knowledge of major scramble areas (e.g. St. Helen's) and concern that known scramble areas (e.g. Silver Lake) were too crowded. A new area should include opportunities for large four-wheel drive vehicles and be linked by the ORV route system to provide legal access for all Department licensed ORVs to local goods and services. The St. Helen's Motorsport Area Development Plan, which has yet to be fully implemented, would provide this important area more recognition and better meet the needs of large four-wheel drive riders. The Department should consider currently compromised sites on

state forest and other public lands and should consider locating a new ORV area in southern Michigan. This had strong public support and was a major goal of the 1979 ORV plan and the 1991-1996 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) that was not realized.

The Department needs land manager partners. This includes the United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service, local government, and major corporate landowners, such as forest products companies and utilities. It is unreasonable to expect all expansion to occur on state forest lands. This is especially true of a potential scramble area in southern Michigan.

5. **Connections:** Connect the existing state-designated trail system with trails or routes, depending on the local available opportunities. This would fulfill the public requests identified during the ORV Plan process for longer riding/touring opportunities. This will be accomplished by sponsor advocates working with the local Department land manager to propose trails or routes, utilizing the trail proposal process to designate the connections, or with the county road commission for specific designated routes on the county road shoulders.
6. **Parallel Trails:** Expand the cycle and ATV trail system by locating additional trails parallel to current trails within the same corridor of influence where feasible. For example, a new ATV trail could be located in the same corridor of influence (e.g. 100 foot wide corridor) as an existing cycle trail. This could limit environmental and social impacts to current ORV system corridors of influence, and make maintenance operations more efficient on a per corridor mile basis. The travel costs of maintenance grant recipients would be greatly reduced, as would the logistics of moving materials (e.g. signs, posts, etc.), if a single maintenance grant sponsor was used. Also, a single trailhead could serve both trails, reducing total trailhead maintenance costs.
7. **Private land additions:** Nonprofit trail grant sponsors and manufacturers, and dealers of ORV/ATVs are being encouraged to work with local units of government and private land owners to secure lands or trail easements nearer the population centers in southern lower Michigan, like the snowmobile trail model.

Fiscal Implications:

Fiscal implications are significant. However, it is imperative to manage the designated system to meet the Department's mission of resource conservation and protection,

outdoor recreation needs, and safeguarding riders. It is also a priority to bring the existing system up to standard.

Designated trail system expansion will result in the need for increased funding support for law enforcement, trail maintenance, damage restoration, and program oversight. This may require an increase in trail permit fees, which have been \$16.25 since April 1, 1996, and a legislative change in the allocation of ORV funds.